

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

Patent Appli ation 09/821,338

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ENVELOPE FILLING STATION

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The invention relates to an envelope-filling station, ~~according to the~~
~~preamble of Patent Claim 1.~~ Envelope-filling stations of this type are known in
general. An example of such an envelope-filling station is described in German
patent application DE 19500746 A1.

10 German patent application DE 2319866 A₁ describes an apparatus which
is intended for conveying, closing and franking letters, ~~and in which~~ That
application describes that, from a stack of filled envelopes, individual envelopes
are conveyed by a conveying-belt pair, from a stack of filled envelopes, over a
bench, under a lifting beam equipped with a roller and actuated by means of a
15 lifting magnet, and then, on the bench, deflected through 90° in relation to the
conveying direction of the conveying belts, are pushed under bars with spring-
mounted rollers which interact with driven mating rollers, with the result that the
envelopes can then be closed and franked. In order to remove build-ups, the bars
with spring-mounted rollers are mounted on a frame arrangement which can be
20 pivoted up by hand.

Generally ~~known furthermore, for example also from US Patent~~
5,560,185, ~~are the~~ describes operations of fixing and opening envelopes which
~~are to be~~ filled in an

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

envelope-filling station. These operations are performed by sucker arrangements which act on the top side and the underside of the envelope transported into the envelope-filling station.

The object of the present invention is to configure an envelope-filling station of the type mentioned in the introduction such that the operations of feeding envelopes, and conveying them further, relative to the push-in station, take place reliably, even at high operating speeds. Another object is an envelope filling station that is adjustable and adjustment to different envelope-filling tasks. is comparatively straightforward.

10 ~~This object is achieved according to invention by an envelope filling station having the features according to Patent Claim 1. Advantageous configurations and developments are characterized in the patent claims subordinate to Claim 1.~~

15 The envelope-filling station proposed here is suitable for a space-saving construction and can be adapted in many different ways to different feeding directions of the enclosures or the sets of enclosures and of the individual envelopes.

Exemplary embodiments are described in detail hereinbelow with reference to the drawings, in which:

20 Fig. 1 illustrates a schematic, perspective view of an envelope-filling station of the type specified here;

Fig. 2 illustrates a simplified plan view of the envelope-filling station according to Fig. 1;

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
 Substitute Specification, marked version
 Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

Fig. 3 illustrates a perspective illustration of a practical embodiment of the envelope-conveying arrangement for the envelope-filling station according to Figs 1 and 2, as seen essentially from the push-in station;

Fig. 4 illustrates a schematic side view of part of a constituent part of the roller bar forming the envelope-conveying arrangement; and

Fig. 5 illustrates a plan view of the bottom region of the roller bar, which is shown in detail form in Fig. 4.

The envelope-filling station of the type specified here and shown in Fig. 1 contains a conveyor 1 with a continuous or cyclically driven conveying chain, of which the conveying fingers project up beyond the top side of the conveyor 1 and form enclosure compartments which are lined up in a row along the top strand of the conveying chain and into which enclosures or sets of enclosures are introduced. Moreover, the envelope-filling station contains a push-in station 2 with a push-in arrangement 3, which Push-in arrangement 3 contains push-in fingers which are articulated on a lever arrangement, and by means of which, during pivot movements of When the lever arrangement, is articulated, enclosures or sets of enclosures ~~which have been~~ delivered by the conveying fingers ~~of the conveyor 1~~ are pushed by their trailing border and, during the operating thrust, pushed into envelopes 30 which are held ready in an open state.

Finally, the envelope-filling station contains an envelope-conveying arrangement 4 with an envelope-filling bench 5. The envelope-filling bench 5 extends essentially transversely over the opening of the push-in station 2. Its top side is located approximately level with the top side of the conveyor 1.

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

The envelope-filling bench 5 is provided with cutouts through which an envelope-conveying belt 6 is routed such that its top strand runs over the envelope-filling bench 5. At its ends, the circulating envelope-conveying belt 6 is positioned over rollers 7 and 8 which are mounted, beneath the envelope-filling
5 bench 5, on a framework which is not shown in Fig. 1, ~~it being possible for the~~
~~Roller 7 to~~ may be driven by a motor 9.

~~While~~ ~~t~~The simplified schematic illustration of Fig. 1 shows closed-border slots for the through-passage of the envelope-conveying belt 6.
Alternatively open slots or cutouts ~~are~~ may be provided ~~in practice~~ in the
10 envelope-conveying bench 5 ~~in order for it to be possible for~~ to enable the
envelope-conveying belt 6 to be positioned on the rollers 7 and 8 without ~~it being~~
~~necessary to splitting~~ the envelope-conveying belt 6.

The envelope-conveying belt 6 runs transversely to the push-in direction of the push-in station 2, and can be driven such that its top strand is
15 moved from right to left in relation to the illustration in Fig. 1.

By means of drives 11 which are only schematically indicated here, a roller bar 10 can be lowered onto the top side of the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6, and raised from it, in a controlled manner. For this purpose, the roller bar 10 is articulated on the sides of the housing of the push-in station 2 via
20 links 12.

The roller bar 10 contains a row of rollers 13 which are on the same track, ~~and of which~~ ~~t~~The axes of rollers 13 are oriented transversely to the
running direction of the envelope-conveying belt 6 and are spring-mounted in

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

relation to the housing of the, roll r bar 10.

At the ~~location where the top strand of beginning of the transport~~
~~between~~ the envelope-conveying belt 6 ~~begins to run through beneath and the~~
comparatively large-diameter rollers 13 of the roller bars 10, namely in the vicinity
5 of the right-hand end of the envelope-filling bench 5 in Fig. 1, envelopes 30 which
have been separated from a stack are conveyed up by an auxilliary conveying
arrangement 14, ~~it being the case that, in~~ the auxilliary conveying arrangement
14, the envelopes 30 are moved in a horizontal direction perpendicular to the
running direction of the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6. The auxilliary
10 conveying arrangement 14 contains an auxilliary conveying belt 17 which is
positioned over rollers 15 and 16, ~~it being~~ it is possible for the roller 15 to be
driven in a controlled manner by means of a drive 18 in order to allow the top
strand of the auxilliary conveying belt 17 to circulate in the direction of the
beginning of the envelope-conveying belt 6. The top strand of the auxilliary
15 conveying belt 17 is located approximately at the same level as the top strand of
the envelope-conveying belt 6. The rollers 15 and 16 are mounted on a frame (~~work~~),
which also serves for supporting the bearings of the rollers 7 and 8 for the
envelope-conveying belt 6. Supported on frame (~~work~~) parts projecting up
beyond the level of the envelope-filling bench 5, or of the top strand of the
20 auxilliary conveying belt 17 and of the envelope-conveying belt 6, is a bearing
journal 19 ~~which is only~~ indicated by a ~~cross chain~~ dotted line in Fig. 1, and
bearing journal 19 serves for the pivot mounting of a cross-sectionally
approximately U-shaped pivot frame 20. This pivot frame 20 extends r arwards

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
 Substitute Specification, marked version
 Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

from the bearing ~~spindle-journal~~¹⁹, above the top strand of the auxiliary conveying belt 17, counter to the conveying direction of the latter. On its underside, which is directed towards the top strand of the auxiliary conveying belt 17, the pivot frame 20 bears abutment ~~rolling bodies~~^{rollers} which interact with the top strand of the auxiliary conveying belt 17 ~~and can only be (seen in part in Fig. 1), although they are not referred to in any more detail.~~ Moreover, a stop slide 21 is guided in a longitudinally displaceable manner on the pivot frame 20 and can be fixed in a certain position by means of a securing arrangement 22. The stop slide 21 contains stops 23 which extend laterally downwards on both sides of the pivot frame 20, ~~and of which, the~~ ^{The bottom ends of stops 23} extend at least to the level of the top side of the top strand of the auxiliary conveying belt 17.

~~Acting through cutouts of the envelope filling bench 5 are sensors 24~~
~~act through cutouts of the envelope-filling bench 5 are positioned proximal to~~
~~which are directed laterally past the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6,~~
~~and, via a~~ ^A signal generator 25, delivers envelope-positioning signals ~~from the~~
~~sensors 24~~ to a central control unit 29. Also acting through cutouts of the envelope-filling bench 5, in the region between the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6 and the opening of the push-in station 2, are suction-cup arrangements 27 actuated by means of a drive 26. A solenoid valve 28 allows the suction-cup arrangement 27 to be subjected to a vacuum in a controllable manner. In conjunction with further apparatus parts, the suction-cup arrangement 27 serves for opening and keeping open the envelope 30 respectively conveyed in front of the opening of the push-in station 2, in order that the envelope can be

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

filled with the enclosures or sets of enclosures.

As with other drives and control apparatuses which, in order to simplify the illustration, are not shown here, the drives 9, 11, 18, 26 and the solenoid valve 28 are connected to the central control unit 29, ~~which~~ Control unit 29 is assigned to the relevant envelope-filling station or the mail-processing machine as a whole and controls the operation thereof.

The functioning of the apparatus parts described hitherto is explained herein below predominantly with reference to Figs 1 - 3.

Envelopes 30 are removed from a stack and separated in a known manner, ~~known per se and~~ Separated envelopes 30 are introduced into the conveying gap between the top strand of the auxiliary conveying belt 17 and the abutment rolling bodies of the pivot frame 20, with the auxiliary conveying arrangement 14 in operation. ~~The introduction takes place such that in the~~ auxiliary conveying arrangement 14, envelopes are transported with the envelope opening is oriented rearwards, ~~and face down counter to the conveying direction of the auxiliary conveying arrangement 14, and the closure axis is located at the bottom.~~ The auxiliary conveying arrangement 14 then moves the relevant envelope 30 forwards parallel to the conveying direction of the conveyor 1 until the leading border of the envelope 30 runs up against the bottom ends of the stops 23 of the stop slide 21, whereupon the drive 18 of the auxiliary conveying belt 17 is brought to a standstill, ~~which can take place with control~~ Stopping of conveying belt 17 maybe be controlled by way of photocells. The stop slide 21 has previously been adjusted such that, when the envelope 30 is

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

brought to a standstill by the stops 23, ~~the envelope opening, as viewed in the~~
~~conveying direction of the envelope-conveying belt 6, is aligned with a position~~
~~which the envelope opening has to assume in relation to the opening of the push-~~
~~in station 2 during correct operation it is in an appropriate position for stuffing. On~~
5 ~~account~~ The arrangement of the stops 23 ~~being arranged on both sides of the~~
auxiliary conveying belt 17, assists in accurately aligning the relevant envelope
30, ~~is also aligned precisely when its leading border runs up.~~

It can be seen from the plan view of Fig. 2 that the envelope 30 fed to
the envelope-conveying arrangement 4 projects beyond the auxiliary conveying
10 belt 17 on both sides ~~of the latter~~. If the envelope 30 is then located in a position
in which its leading border butts against the stops 23, then the left-hand,
projecting part of the envelope 30, in relation to the illustration in Fig. 2, already
projects into the region between the first roller 13 of the roller bar 10 and the top
strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6.

15 As the envelope 30 is conveyed up by the auxiliary conveying
arrangement 17, the roller bar 10 is raised ~~to a sufficient extent by the drives 11,~~
~~on account of corresponding control by~~ The central control unit 29, controls the
drive 11 so that with the result that the left-hand part of the envelope 30, in
relation to the illustration in Fig. 2, can run without obstruction into the space
20 between the first roller 13 of the roller bar 10 and the top strand of the envelope-
conveying belt 6.

The envelope-conveying belt 6 is ~~then set in motion by virtue of when~~
the drive 9 ~~being~~ is switched on from the central control unit 29 and the roller bar

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
 Substitute Specification, marked version
 Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

10 is lowered ~~in the direction of the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6~~
~~by means of~~ by the drives 11. The conveying gap between the first roller 13 and
 the conveying belt 6 grips the envelope 30 positioned against the stops 23 and
 draws it out past the stops 23 and between the pivot frame 20 and the top strand
 5 of the auxiliary conveying belt 17. The envelope 30 is then, by interaction of the
 rollers 13 of the roller bar 10 and the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6,
 conveyed further until its leading border, namely the left-hand edge in relation to
 the illustration in Fig. 2, comes into the region of the sensors 24. ~~which, on~~
~~account of the envelope-positioning signals of~~ Based on sensors 24 detecting the
 10 envelope the signal generator 25, ~~results in the controllable controls~~ drive 9 being
to be switched off ~~first of all~~, with the result that, finally, the envelope 30 is
 conveyed precisely into the position in front of the opening of the push-in station
 2, ~~as is known per se to the person skilled in the art.~~

The drive 26 of the suction-cup arrangement is then made to operate
 15 and, ~~by virtue of~~ opening of the solenoid valve 28 ~~being opened~~, a vacuum is
 brought into effect, ~~with the result that~~ whereby the adhesive flap of the envelope
 30 is secured on the envelope-filling bench 5. Moreover, the drives 11 are moved
~~with the effect of raising~~ to raise the roller bar 10 off from the top strand of the
 envelope-conveying belt 6. At the same time ~~and~~ the top part of the envelope 30
 20 is raised, ~~by further arrangements, in particular~~ by means which will be described
 herein below, with the result that the envelope opening is ~~freed~~ open in order that
 the push-in arrangement 3 of the push-in station 2 can push into the envelope 30
 an enclosure or a s t of nclosures which has been conveyed up by the

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

conveyor 1.

Once this has taken place, the drive 9 sets the envelope-conveying belt 6 in operation again and the filled envelope 30 leaves the region of the push-in station 2 in order to be closed and conveyed further.

5 ~~On account~~Because of the comparatively large diameter and spring mounting of the rollers 13 of the roller bar 10 ~~and on account of the spring mounting of the individual rollers 13 relative to the bar housing~~, the envelope-conveying arrangement 4 is not affected by widely variations in differing envelope thicknesses. Moreover, the envelope-conveying arrangement 4 can process a
10 wide range of different envelope formats. ~~Of course~~For different format envelopes, it is necessary here ~~to provide for adjustability of the stop arrangement 23 parallel to the conveying direction of the envelope-conveying belt 6.~~

A further advantage of the envelope-filling station shown and described
15 is that, ~~if, even with large tolerances of the envelope 30 processed, buildups when jams occur on the envelope-conveying path.~~ These build-ups can easily be removed once the pivot frame 20 has been pivoted up and/or the roller bar 10 has been raised.

20 The bench top may be formed differently from the simplified form according to the schematic illustration of Fig. 1, ~~as is shown in Fig. 3 in relation to a practical depicts a preferred embodiment of the envelope-conveying arrangement.~~ According to the ~~practical~~ embodiment of Fig. 3, the rollers 7 and 8

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

are arranged in a floating manner on ~~one~~ a first side of a framework, for supporting the envelope-filling bench 5, ~~and~~ the slots for the through-passage of the envelope-transporting belt 6 open towards the border of the envelope-filling bench 5 on ~~this~~ the first side, with the result that the envelope-conveying
5 belt 6 can be positioned on the rollers 7 and 8 from this side of the arrangement.

The roller bar 10 has an essentially beam-like outline. The individual rollers 13 have a diameter in the range of from 40 mm and 100 mm.

Fig. 4 shows the bottom wall region of the housing of the roller bar 10, it being possible for this wall region to be divided up in a specific manner. Unlike
10 the purely schematic illustration of Fig. 1, the side walls and the top wall of the housing of the roller bar 10 may be provided with through-passages, cutouts, stiffening ribs and the like. It is possible in particular for the housing of the roller bar 10 to be designed, in its entirety, as a plastic injection moulding, ~~the~~ the capacity for shaping of the injection moulding being may be provided by
15 corresponding cutouts. In the specific embodiment of the roller bar 10, ~~which is~~ illustrated schematically in Figs. 4 and 5, the bottom wall region of the housing is formed by a series of approximately V-shaped spring tongues 32, of which the lateral legs are connected at 33 to side-wall parts of the housing of the roller bar 10 and anchored thereon. The lateral legs of the spring tongues 32 extend
20 inwards, in an angled manner in their center plane, to form upwardly projecting bearing lugs 34, on which the rollers 13 are mounted in each case. Finally, the spring tongues 32 contain a U-shaped part 35 which connects the side legs and in the vertex region of which is located the through-passage for the connection

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
Substitute Specification, marked version
Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

36 of a suction cup 37 assigned in each case to some of the rollers 13.

If the roller bar 10 is raised off from the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6 by the drives II, each of the rollers 13 on the housing of the roller bar 10 assumes, relative to an envelope 30 which rests on the top strand of the envelope-conveying belt 6, the position which is illustrated by solid lines in Fig. 4. The bottom vertex of the roller 13 is at a certain distance from the top side of the envelope 30. The spring tongue 32 of the base region of the housing of the roller bar 10, said spring tongue serving for mounting the roller 13, is located horizontally at a certain distance above the envelope 30. If the roller bar 10 is raised further, the distance also increases such that the bottom opening of the suction cup 37 also maintains a certain distance from the top side of the envelope 30.

If, however, the roller bar 10 is lowered, the lowest point of the roller 13 is positioned on the top side of the envelope 30 and presses the envelope 30 against the moving envelope-conveying belt 6. In order, however, to avoid the situation where the top side of the envelope 30 is then drawn with friction along the opening of the suction cup 37, the roller bar 10 is lowered further, with the result that the position depicted by chain-dotted lines in Fig. 4 is reached. In this position, the spring tongues 32 are bent upwards from the anchoring locations 33 because they are pressed upwards at the bearing lugs 34 by the spindles of the rollers 13. The connections 36 at the front ends, in the region of the part 35 of the spring tongues 32, are raised as a result and the suction cups 37 are raised off from the top side of the envelopes 30. In this state, the envelope-conveying

Appl. No.: 09/821,338
 Substitute Specification, marked version
 Responsive to Office Action dated January 13, 2004

arrangement 4 can convey envelopes 30 without obstruction to a stop

arrangement (see Figs. 1 and 2). If the envelope-conveying belt 6 is then

brought to a standstill and the roller bar 10 is raised into the position represented

by solid lines in Fig. 4, the suction cups 37 are positioned on the top side of the

5 envelope 30. If the suction cups 37 are then subjected to a vacuum, they are then secured firmly by suction on the top side of the envelope 30. Further raising of the roller bar 10 subsequently causes the envelope 30 to be opened. During opening the adhesive flap of ~~said the envelope being is secured to meanwhile on the level of the envelope-filling bench 5~~ by the suction-cup arrangement 27. It

10 can be seen that the arrangement shown in Figs. 4 and 5 provides a drive for the suction-cup arrangement 36/37, which acts on the top side of the envelopes, in the form of the drive of the roller bar 10.

The lateral legs of the spring tongues 32 may be referred to as leaf-spring pairs. Unlike the embodiment shown, it is also possible for the bearing lugs 34

15 and a securing means for the connection 36 of suction cups 37 to be provided on individual leaf springs which are routed to the anchoring location 33 of the carrier housing of the roller bar 10.

20